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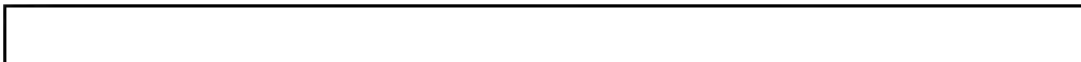
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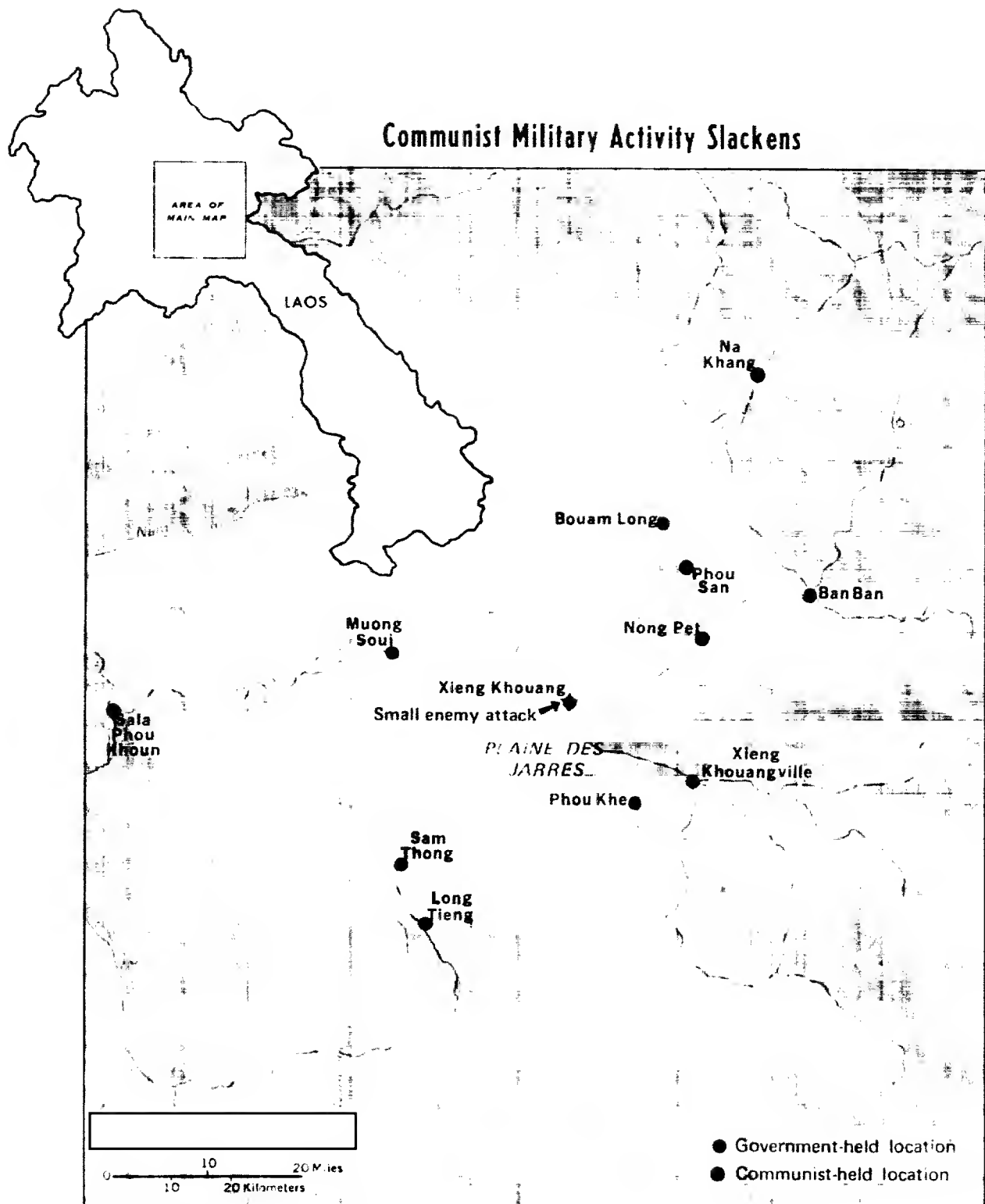
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Laos: The military situation near the Plaine des Jarres is relatively quiet, but new attacks could come with little warning.

Communist military activity on 19 February was limited to a small probing and rocket attack against Xieng Khouang airstrip. Government patrols and close air support have inflicted heavy casualties on enemy elements dug in immediately north of the airfield, but the enemy still holds the high ground.

Losses suffered by the North Vietnamese in two previous attempts to overrun the base are probably responsible in part for the temporary lull in enemy pressure. The enemy is probably regrouping his forces and awaiting poor flying weather before launching another round of heavy attacks against the government command post.

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Jordan: Talks between the government and the fedayeen to resolve differences over King Husayn's recent "law and order" decrees will probably resume tomorrow.

Emotion and resentment on both sides could result in an early collapse and open the way for another government-fedayeen collision. Both sides are wary, and their forces remain in place. Husayn's prestige and authority are again at stake, and he is extremely sensitive to charges that he has "backed down." The fedayeen have gained wide popular support and the semblance of an unprecedented unity from last week's showdown, and they will want to exploit their added leverage.

The US Embassy describes the situation on the eve of the talks as very touchy but concludes that neither side really wants a "bloodbath." The embassy expects that a compromise is a more likely outcome than full-scale hostilities. According to the embassy, fedayeen leaders in the last few days have been trying to display an attitude of "reasonableness and responsibility." They have sought to curb individual fedayeen excesses and have been telling diplomats and journalists in Amman that they do not intend to "rub the King's face in the dirt." To allay army resentment and curry popular support, the fedayeen are emphasizing the "unity of purpose" between the commandos and the army against the common Israeli enemy.

The fedayeen united command on 18 February issued its own set of "law and order" instructions, which are very similar to the King's. The main difference between the two is that enforcement would be in fedayeen rather than government hands. The idea of a "national unity government," presumably including some Palestinians, may be gaining favor as the basis for a mutually acceptable compromise.



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India: A number of last-minute moves have enabled Prime Minister Gandhi to improve her position for today's opening of the budget session of parliament.

Mrs. Gandhi has scored by mediating a long-smoldering dispute between two northern Indian states and by drafting new legislation to overcome the Supreme Court's recent decision nullifying bank nationalization. Two new ministerial appointments have, on the whole, strengthened her cabinet while avoiding antagonizing disappointed office-seekers. By supporting a third party, her followers have displaced a rival Organization Congress leader as head of the government in the key state of Uttar Pradesh. They have also formed a fragile coalition in Bihar--India's second most populous state.

During the almost two months' parliamentary recess, both factions of the Congress Party have concentrated, however, on building up their organizations. Mrs. Gandhi's party has gained an edge in the maneuvering, but her competitors are by no means cowed and still lead the strongest opposition ever to confront an Indian prime minister. Mrs. Gandhi's accomplishments, although recognized as significant by all political factions, have not so far provoked large-scale defections from the rival Organization Congress.

The Prime Minister is determined to maintain the momentum she has been developing, with temporary reverses, since last summer. So far she has done well, but the traditionally acrimonious budget session of parliament will test her government as never before.



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NOTES

France-Italy: The French have agreed to sell enriched uranium for the reactor core of Italy's new naval logistics support ship, Enrico Fermi, according to an authoritative US nuclear journal. The contract was not channeled through the EURATOM Supply Agency, as required by the EURATOM Treaty, and the Commission of the European Communities is considering what action it will take in response to this violation. Although France earlier supplied enriched uranium to Italy for use in the ship's land-based prototype reactor, it had stipulated that the material was not to be used in the actual ship reactor. The US has refused to provide any uranium because Italy would not remove the propulsion project from naval jurisdiction, but France probably will argue that this is of little consequence inasmuch as the Enrico Fermi is not a warship.

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Congo (Brazzaville): Leftist radicals are attempting to consolidate, at the expense of more moderate government elements, the pre-eminent position that they attained last December. Late last month, 15 moderate company-grade officers from tribes and regions traditionally hostile to extremists were purged from the army and reassigned to civilian jobs. In the short term, removal of these officers will probably strengthen extremist control of the army, but this purge could provoke intensified regional hostility in the future.

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